

FM 2347 (George Bush Drive) and FM 2154 (Wellborn Road) /Union Pacific Railroad Interchange Project

Application for

Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery Discretionary Grants



Source: Texas Department of Transportation

Prepared by:

FM 2347 (George Bush Drive) and FM 2154 (Wellborn Road) /Union Pacific Railroad Interchange Project

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I. Project Description

The George Bush Drive and Wellborn Road/Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) interchange is located in College Station in Brazos County and in East Central Texas. It is approximately 100 miles from Austin, 100 miles from Houston, 165 miles from Dallas and is home to Texas A&M University. This interchange is the west-side gateway entrance to Texas A&M University.



The George Bush Drive and Wellborn Road/UPRR interchange project presents a great opportunity to create jobs, foster multimodal solutions and stimulate

not only the College Station/Bryan economy but the regional economy and beyond. The enhancement of the railroad crossing for the Union Pacific Railroad will provide a safer, more efficient route.



Source: Yahoo Maps

This at-grade intersection is utilized heavily by trains, Texas A&M Transit buses, vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians. The increased volume during peak times can affect pedestrian/bicyclist safety and cause delays for drivers, transit as well as train traffic.

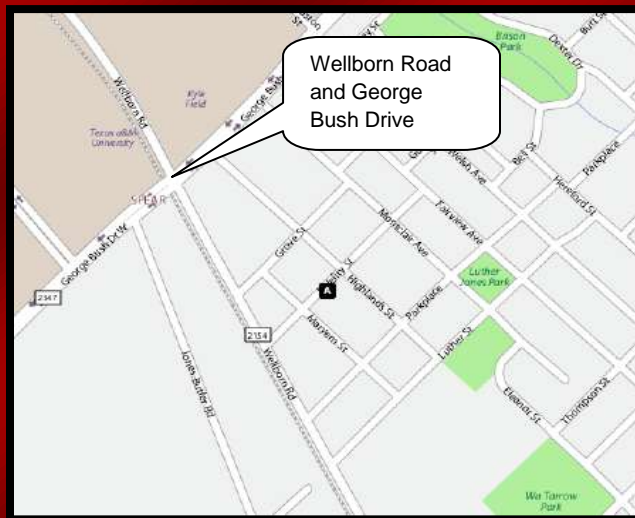
The proposed project will reduce congestion and improve safety by separating three modes of travel.

Planned improvements include:

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- A railroad bridge to separate trains from a grade depressed George Bush Drive intersection.
- A pedestrian bridge over George Bush Drive and Wellborn Road and under UPRR.
- Wellborn Road northbound and southbound vehicular bridges to separate traffic from George Bush Drive. Turning traffic and east-west through traffic will meet at a signalized and depressed intersection.

This project aims to improve the traffic flow at George Bush Drive while providing safety for both pedestrians/bicyclist, trains, transit and drivers.



Source: Yahoo Maps

The Applicant is seeking Federal funding assistance for the George Bush Drive and Wellborn Road/UPRR Interchange Project under the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) Discretionary Grant program. The applicant is also petitioning the Bryan/College Station Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to add the project to the current short range plan the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) to enable the applicant to receive Federal Funds and complete the project design, right of way (ROW) acquisition and construction phases.

II. Long-Term Outcomes

A study of the Wellborn Road corridor, a major north-south transportation link through College Station, began in the 1990's. The explosion of development in the southern part of the city has caused a rapid increase in traffic in recent years.

The Bryan-College Station MPO employed a consulting firm to study the possibility of relocating the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) through the community. That option was rejected when a consensus on an acceptable route was not reached.

However, the study did recommend grade-separated interchanges along the corridor. The planned

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interchange at George Bush Drive, for example, is one of the higher priority recommendations.

III. State of Good Repair

A. Traffic

According to the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), “Wellborn Road and George Bush Drive each currently carry over 31,000 vehicles per day (vpd) and are projected to carry 60,300 vpd and 51,600 vpd, respectively, by 2026”.

The current volumes cause congestion during peak travel periods and anticipated levels are expected to exceed the intersection's capacity.



B. Safety

The location of this intersection at the west-side of Texas A&M campus and a gateway to campus makes

it a highly traveled, multi-modal intersection. Increased delays, caused by crashes or high traffic, often tempt drivers to take greater risks to reach their destinations. Currently, trains, automobiles, buses, bicyclist, and pedestrians share the intersection, resulting in a high potential for crashes. The planned interchange will separate three modes of travel.



C. Single Point Urban Interchange

The proposed design improves capacity with less ROW to be acquired than other alternative designs. It allows north-south traffic to bypass the intersection, substantially reducing delay for all directions of travel. All turning movements and east-west through traffic meet at a single, signalized intersection.

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IV. Economic Competiveness

According to the City of College Station newly adopted Comprehensive Plan, for the last several decades, College Station has served as a regional economic hub within the Texas Triangle (i.e. Houston, Dallas, San Antonio). The largest public employer is Texas A&M University. Technology-based business, medical facilities and retailers represent the largest private employers in College Texas. Education is the biggest business in College Station. A significant portion of the local population derives its living directly through employment with Texas A&M University, the Texas A&M University System, or Blinn College. Still more of the population makes their livelihood indirectly by providing support services and products to these institutions and their employees. College Station benefits from the commercialization of knowledge-

based activities originating on the Texas A&M University and Blinn campuses and associated entrepreneurship. Information technology, biotechnology, agriculture technology, and engineering sectors represent a few of the most promising opportunities for commercialization. Coincidentally, one of the major hubs and gateways (George Bush and Wellborn interchange) to the University is underperforming and an obstacle to these economic resources.

While business associated with education is important the local focus is to diversify the economy. It is necessary to have investment and development that attracts and retains the talent necessary for emerging industries, especially given the focus on research and commercialization of products and services coming out of Texas A&M University. The City of College Station has identified healthcare as an emerging business sector and the city as a regional healthcare center with mobility to and from the region as an important component. Finally, in the City's newly adopted comprehensive plan the neighborhoods surrounding the Texas A&M University campus have been designated as a re-development zone, because this area is of the older part of the City. Locally, upgrading the multimodal interchange (George Bush and Wellborn/UPPR) will help foster the redevelopment of

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these areas, and regionally it will foster economic competitiveness with its larger neighbors, Houston, Dallas and San Antonio.

V. Livability

The George Bush Drive and Wellborn Road/UPRR interchange project will improve user mobility and lessen congestion, offering numerous multi-modal options for the traveling public.

According to the Bryan/College Station MPO's *Railroad Project Environmental Overview Assessment*, as of 2003, about 23 trains pass through Brazos County on an average weekday. UPRR estimates 40 trains per day would be running in year 2025. According to the UPRR, the single track section from University Drive south to Navasota is one of the most restrictive sections of the railroad between Houston and the Dallas/Fort Worth area because of train congestion and speed constraints.

According to the TxDOT, "Wellborn Road and George Bush Drive each currently carry over 31,000 vehicles per day (vpd) and are projected to carry 60,300 vpd and 51,600 vpd, respectively, by 2026".

The current volumes cause congestion during peak travel periods and anticipated levels are expected to exceed the intersection's capacity.

While congestion reduction positively impacts local residents there are additional livability interest that will be improved. A pedestrian bridge over George Bush Drive and Wellborn Road and under UPRR is proposed as part of the project. This would give pedestrians of which the majority of those are students trying to get on campus a safer more accessible route. Bicyclists would also be accommodated not only on the bridge but through striped bike lanes on the proposed roadway improvements. The railroad bridge would separate the trains from vehicle traffic that would be utilizing the George Bush Drive depressed intersection. This would free-up the rest of the interchange for vehicles and transit. Texas A&M University operates its own transit system and this intersection is a major bus route.

As part of the preliminary design and environmental compliance portion of the project a public involvement process was conducted. Below is a summary of one of the meetings.

Public Meeting

Date: July 14, 2005

Location: College Station Conference Center, College Station

TxDOT presented the preferred alternative for the project using an aerial photograph overlaid with the

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planned improvement. Attendees included property owners, business owners, elected officials and representatives from Texas A&M University. Both positive and negative opinions were expressed. Most in attendance agreed with the need for the project.

VI. Sustainability

Beginning in September 2006, the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee met regularly to develop the Comprehensive Plan. The Advisory Committee and the Planning and Zoning Commission forwarded the recommended vision statement to the City Council in May 2007. Following the statement's adoption by the City Council, the Advisory Committee prepared working goals that were presented to the Planning and Zoning Commission and the City Council in August 2007.

City of College Station Vision Statement

College Station, the proud home of Texas A&M University and the heart of the Research Valley, will remain a vibrant, forward-thinking, knowledge-based community which promotes the highest quality of life for its citizens by ...

- Ensuring safe, tranquil, clean, and healthy neighborhoods with enduring character;

- Increasing and maintaining the mobility of College Station citizens through a well planned and constructed inter-modal transportation system;
- Expecting sensitive development and management of the built and natural environment;
- Supporting well planned, quality and sustainable growth;
- Valuing and protecting our cultural and historical community resources;
- Developing and maintaining quality cost-effective community facilities, infrastructure and services which ensure our City is cohesive and well connected; and,
- Pro-actively creating and maintaining economic and educational opportunities for all citizens.

College Station will continue to be among the friendliest and most responsive of communities and a demonstrated partner in maintaining and enhancing all that is good and celebrated in the Brazos Valley. It will continue to be a place where Texas and the world come to learn, live, and conduct business!

City of College Station Green Efforts

In addition to conserving existing resources, efforts can be initiated that enable use of sustainable practices. Walking and biking can reduce reliance on the automobile. Transit can reduce the number of vehicles on the road and therefore emissions. City

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vehicles can use alternative fuels, reducing reliance on gasoline. Trees can be preserved or planted especially along major thoroughfares to further green the City.

VII. Safety

As with any railroad at grade crossings safety is a big concern. Furthermore, increased delays, caused by crashes or high traffic, often tempt drivers to take greater risks to reach their destinations.

Because of the proximity of the Texas A&M University campus, and the high student traffic, this intersection becomes an even more safety priority. According to the *Eagle* a local newspaper publication, Texas A&M for the 2009 fall semester will have one of the nation's largest freshman classes, more than 8,100 students, and is expecting an overall enrollment of 48,000 to 49,000 students.

Currently, trains, automobiles, transit, bicyclists and pedestrians share the intersection, resulting in a high potential for crashes. The planned interchange will separate three modes of travel. This project aims to improve the traffic flow at George Bush Drive while providing safety for pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers.

VIII. Job Creation and Economic Stimulus

The George Bush and Wellborn Road/UPPR interchange is an important project not only locally but regionally. This project would foster approximately 200 short term construction jobs and long term investment and job creation. Railroad commerce would increase because of the free flow through the intersection. Multi venue functions would increase for Texas A&M University because the stadiums are located in the vicinity of this intersection and finally redevelopment would be fostered.

This intersection also serves as a major east west connection between the west campus and the east campus. The east campus is the main campus. By improving this intersection this project would spur further development on the west campus. Texas A&M University has identified the improvement of this intersection especially the pedestrian underpass at UPPR in their Campus Master Plan as vital to the University's overall development.

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As part of the creation of jobs and stimulating the economy, and a beneficiary of greater transportation connectivity by the construction of this project, is the Research Valley Partnership which promotes Brazos County, the cities of Bryan and College Station, the state of Texas and Texas A&M.

The Research Valley Partnership also understands how vital transportation facilities are to enhancing commerce. Their efforts are focused on creating new jobs and investment. They assist businesses with:

- market and labor research
- start-ups of technology commercialization
- site selection
- business growth and expansion
- incentives
- introduction to community leaders
- government approvals
- fast track permitting
- attracting labor.

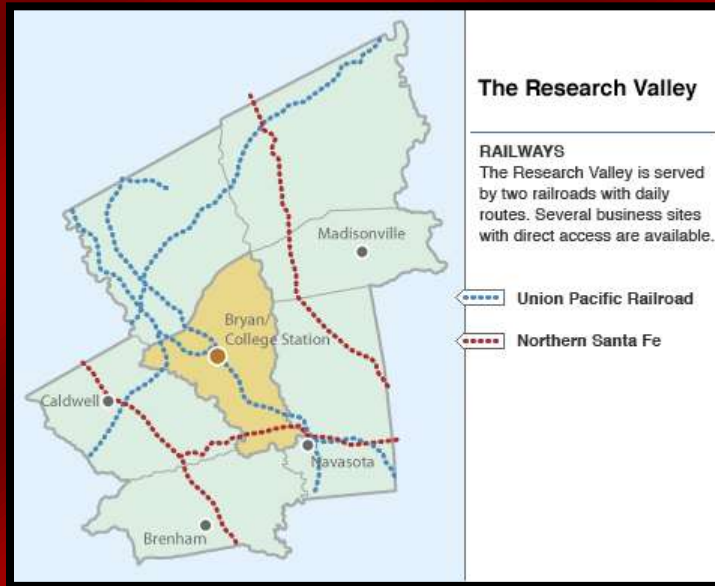
The Research Valley's offers efficient land and air transportation infrastructure for businesses operations across every industry. Located in the center of the Texas Triangle, the Research Valley provides easy connectivity to anywhere in Texas and all parts of the world.

In addition to I-35 and I-45 running north-south on the western and eastern edges, and I-10, running east-west on the southern edge, The Research Valley is served by federal highway, U.S. - 290 and State Highways 6 and 21, with George Bush Drive and Wellborn Road connecting to State Highway 6 and 21 respectively.

Railroads Serving Research Valley

Rail service in The Research Valley is primarily on the Houston local route, originating in Houston and proceeding north. College Station is serviced by two nationally known rail lines with daily routes, and one of those being UPRR. In addition, several business sites are equipped with direct access available.

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*Source: Research Valley Partnership



*Source: Research Valley Partnership

Research Valley-Texas Locator Map

IX. Project Schedule

Presently the George Bush and Wellborn Road/UPPR Interchange Project is in the 2005 – 2035 MPO Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). This project had been identified in the fiscally constrained short

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range projects list (0-10 years). Numerous avenues have been explored to fund this project. However, TxDOT does not foresee funding to be available in the very near future. The estimated total project cost is \$41,000,000.00. This would include ROW acquisition, final design, and construction. The innovation portion of this project will be explained below in the final design, ROW and construction portion of the project.

A. State and Local Planning

Both the local MPO and TxDOT have agreed to work hard to put this project in the TIP and STIP before the TIGER discretionary Grant funding is awarded.

B. Technical Feasibility (Design)

Preliminary design has been completed. As part of the preliminary design a schematic of the project was approved by TxDOT's design division. This schematic will be used to identify ROW needs and was also used to display information as part of the environmental and public involvement process.

C. Technical Feasibility (Environmental)

An Environmental Impact Study (EIS) was conducted for this project and a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was issued in January of 2008.

D. Financial Feasibility

The City of College Station will participate in helping fund this project. As customary the City will contribute the normal amount 10% of the ROW acquisition costs.

X. Innovation

To bring innovation and efficiency to the project, a fast track approach will be utilized in the design, ROW acquisition and construction of the project with performance incentives and penalties as part of the construction bid documents. Further innovation will be employed with the separation of existing traffic during the construction phase especially keeping the railroad operational at all times. Furthermore, The Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) is located on the Texas A&M University campus and will incorporate this project into its Mobility Initiative Project. This project proposes to use Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) and provide real time data to help facilitate traffic movement throughout the Bryan/College Station Area.

A. Right of Way Acquisition

ROW acquisition has not been initiated to date because of lack of funds. However, ROW needs have been identified through the preliminary design and environmental process. The design build model would shorten the overall project development time line by

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having final design and ROW acquisition being conducted simultaneously.

B. Final Design

Through the design build model at the 60% benchmark of final design, dirt will start to be moved by the contractor on the design build team. This will shorten the overall construction timeline. Estimated construction completion date is February 2012.

Letters supporting this project have been attached to this application. The letters are from the Bryan/College Station MPO, TxDOT, TTI, and Texas A&M University.

XI. Partnership

Because of the importance of this project not only locally but regionally the following partners would like to see this project move forward and have been involved to date:

- City of College Station
- Bryan/College Station MPO
- TxDOT
- Texas A&M University
- Texas A&M University Transit
- Brazos Valley Transit
- Union Pacific Railroad
- TTI
- Brazos County
- Brazos Valley Council of Governments

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XII. Additional Resources

The following web sites contain additional information pertaining to the concepts, purpose, and need for the George Bush Drive and Wellborn Road/UPRR Interchange Project.

A&M to Welcome Class of 2013 *The Eagle*:
<http://www.theeagle.com/am/A-amp-M-to-welcome-the-Class-of-2013->

City of College Station Comprehensive Plan:
<http://www.cstx.gov/Index.aspx?page=2471>

MPO *Railroad Project Environmental Overview Assessment*:
<http://www.bcsmpo.org/pdf/files%20on%20www.bcsmpo.org/Final%20BCS%20Overview%20EA.pdf>

Research Valley Partnership:
<http://www.researchvalley.org/Website/Internal.aspx?Id=33>

TTI Mobility Initiative (ITS)
http://tti.tamu.edu/groups/program.htm?p_org_code=DIV

TxDOT George Bush Drive Wellborn Road Interchange Project Study:

http://www.txdot.gov/project_information/projects/bryan/fm2347/default.htm

2005 – 2030 Metropolitan Transportation Plan:

<http://www.bcsmpo.org/mtp.htm>

Texas A&M University Campus Master Plan

<http://www.tamu.edu/campusplan/pdf/A&M%20Summary%2004.06.24.pdf>